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ABSTRACT

This packet, part of Project STEPS (Sequenced Transition to Education in the Public Schools), is intended to aid local agencies in forming local interagency councils and is based on experiences in Kentucky since 1983 in the development of Preschool Interagency Planning Councils (PIPCs). Section 1 provides an overview of the PIPC network, a group of community agencies working to coordinate and improve services to young children with disabilities and their families. Section 2 provides information in a question and answer format on the purpose of the PIPC and covers the need for such councils, how interagency councils help their communities through early intervention, and examples of PIPC accomplishments. Section 3 provides specific information and sample forms for establishing and maintaining local PIPCs. Included are a discussion of organizational strategies, a sample letter inviting agencies to an organizational meeting, an agenda for the first interagency council meeting, and a survey form. (DB)

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ED 423 630

PROJECT STEPS

(Sequenced Transition to Education in the Public Schools)

LOCAL INTERAGENCY COUNCIL

STARTER KIT

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EC 305972

INTRODUCTION

The following packet was designed to aid local agencies in forming local interagency councils. The packet was developed as a result of experiences in Kentucky through the development of interagency councils or PIPCs (Preschool Interagency Planning Councils) which began in 1983 in Lexington, Kentucky.

This packet is divided into 3 major sections. Section one provides an overview of the Preschool Interagency Planning Council, Kentucky's interagency council network. Section two provides general information on the purpose of interagency councils. Section three provides specific information and sample forms for establishing and maintaining local interagency councils.

PRESCHOOL INTERAGENCY PLANNING COUNCILS (PIPCS)

Kentucky's Network of Local Interagency Councils for Services to Children (Birth - 5) with Disabilities

Background: In 1983, agencies in Lexington, Kentucky, serving children with disabilities age birth-5 years formed a local interagency council known as the Preschool Interagency Planning Council (PIPC). This was a result of (1) recognition of the need for and benefits of interagency coordination and (2) commitment on the part of individual agencies to improve the quality and quantity of services to young children with disabilities. Following the success of the Lexington PIPC, there are now more than 45 PIPCs in Kentucky that have expanded to address services for all children birth through five years. PIPC has become a grassroots movement. Establishment of PIPCs across the state is (1) helping local communities improve services, (2) promoting networking and advocacy for services for young children on a statewide basis, and (3) facilitating activities for statewide planning and program development.

What is PIPC? PIPC is a group of agencies voluntarily working together to improve services for young children and their families. The membership and focus of each varies from community to community to reflect local needs. However, the overall purpose of a PIPC is to coordinate and improve services to young children and families through interagency approaches which are both programmatically sound and cost effective.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF AN INTERAGENCY COUNCIL

Why is there a need for interagency councils? Local interagency councils can help address some of the problems common to service delivery for young children. These include (1) a system of diverse service providers which, if not coordinated, can lead to service fragmentation on a system and child/family level, (2) funding which is inadequate, unstable, and fragmented, and (3) lack of one local agency responsible for coordination, funding, and leadership for services for children birth through 5 years.

How can interagency councils help communities through early intervention? Local interagency councils or more specifically, early childhood services, help communities. The services they provide result in long term cost savings for society. Longitudinal studies with special needs preschool children have shown that when these children are provided quality preschool services (as compared to those who had none), impact is that these children: (1) return to society $4 to $7 for every $1 invested in preschool, (2) are twice as likely to be employed as adults, thereby being tax payers and not tax and human service burdens, (3) have one-third higher high school graduation rates, (4) have 40% lower arrest rates, (5) are 1/2 as likely to be involved in teenage pregnancy, (6) are twice as likely to function at or above the national average on competency testing, and (7) spend only 1/2 as many years in special education in the public schools.

What can a local interagency council accomplish? Based on experiences of Kentucky PIPCs, a local interagency council can do much to improve services. Some things that have been done across Kentucky are as follows.

1. Conduct needs assessments resulting in data for local, state, and federal, sources; develop comparative analysis of services.

2. Acquire grants to conduct special interagency, community-wide project such as:
   a. development of a community-wide model for the transition of children with disabilities from preschool to the public school
   b. providing mental health services training for staff
   c. conducting a needs survey concerning a community-wide transportation system for preschool children with disabilities.

3. Conduct public awareness concerning the benefits of early intervention and services available in the community through:
   a. development and mass dissemination of a PIPC brochure
   b. interviews with the media
   c. public speaking, booths at information fairs, meeting with various groups.

4. Provide dual enrollment of children in different service agencies to make the broad community services system as responsive as possible to individual child and family needs.

5. Provide cross program visitation for staff from various agencies.

6. Make available joint staff and parent training, ongoing information sharing, and the sharing of materials and equipment.

7. Provide monthly meetings to serve as a forum for ongoing coordination of services.

8. Conduct community-wide Child Find and screening activities.

9. Collaboration with local universities on special training grants.

10. Serve as advocate for early intervention and preschool services with other groups in the community such as physicians, physical therapists, the public schools, child care council, and the regional mental health/mental retardation board.

11. Have representation on various local and state groups having influence concerning young children with disabilities.

12. Conduct studies on issues common to all programs and make recommendations for policies, procedures, and/or staff training related to issues such as:
    a. coordination with physicians
    b. communicable diseases
    c. use of medical procedures (e.g. catheterization), first aid, and CPR
    d. coordination of overall policies and procedures for compliance with PL 94-142 as amended by PL 99-457 and PL 102-119 and other legal requirements related to programs for young children with disabilities.

13. Conduct community-wide interagency planning regarding service expansion and further coordination related to PL 99-457 and PL 102-119.

14. Establish community-wide service coordination and direction service for children with disabilities and children at-risk, birth-5 years.

15. Help to advocate for state and federal legislation to improve services for young children with disabilities.

LOCAL INTERAGENCY COUNCIL STARTER KIT

The following is a kit designed to help communities set up a local interagency council. A local interagency council is a group of agencies which voluntarily join together to improve services for young children with disabilities. No agency requires that communities set up interagency councils. However, state and federal agencies and legislation strongly encourage interagency coordination and a local interagency council is a good way of doing this.

The kit contains:

1. sample letter to send to agencies inviting them to the local interagency council organizational meeting

2. agenda for first local interagency council meeting

3. handouts for first local interagency council meeting (may also be mailed out in advance, but have extras at the meeting too)
   a. Interagency Coordination: Making It Work - describes organizational and group dynamics to consider in setting up a local interagency council.
   b. Needs Survey - to distribute at end of first local interagency council meeting for members to send or bring back to second meeting. Survey confirms who will participate and what each agency hopes to accomplish in local interagency council which, in turn, will help the group set priorities.

The first question is "Who gets the kit?" In other words, which agencies should be invited to join. This will vary from community to community. It is recommended that communities start with those agencies which have direct knowledge and interest in the needs of children ages five years and younger. This is the benefit of involving agencies with common interests, knowledge, and terminology, thereby facilitating communication and group identity. It may also result in starting with a smaller number of agencies which is preferable to keep the group manageable at first.

Once agencies have been targeted, set a date, time, and meeting site. It may be advisable to check with a few key prospective members in setting the date. The purpose of the first meeting are (1) to acquaint the participants with what a local interagency council is, (2) to give participants a chance to get to know each other on a personal basis, critical to trust building and networking, and (3) to determine whether or not there is a desire to form a local interagency council. Choose the meeting date, time and time allocation, and meeting site with these purposes in mind. A more informal setting is recommended. Have refreshments and allow for visiting. Better yet, have a breakfast or lunch meeting.

Send out a letter of invitation to the meeting. Be sure to enclose an RSVP. Follow up with a phone call if necessary. Talk the meeting up among your colleagues. Communicate enthusiasm and an attitude of "this is a meeting you'll not want to miss."

To get a local interagency council started, someone is going to have to take charge. Someone will have to set the meeting up and chair the first meeting or two. This person will have to provide leadership until it is possible to elect a chairperson, recorder, secretary, and other officers the group feels it needs. Electing officers may be an agenda item for the second meeting if the group members know each other well. For some groups, it may be necessary for the "temporary" leader to serve in that capacity for several meetings until the group has more of a sense of identity. A critical factor here, however, is for the leader to cultivate that group identity. The leader needs to conduct the meeting in such a way so that the agenda for the local interagency council is not seen as the agenda of the leader. Local interagency council members must feel they are going to their own meeting . . . not the meeting of the person who is serving as group leader.

At the organizational meeting, it is important to convey a friendly atmosphere to "get acquainted". Name tags including agency representation may be helpful. Even with the informal atmosphere, however, there is important business . . . forming the local interagency council. The enclosed materials can be used or adapted to give structure to this and subsequent meetings. Meeting organizers may find it helpful to have someone from an established local interagency council or from a state agency come to the organizational meeting to share information on local interagency council and other encouragements to the groups.

INTERAGENCY COORDINATION
MAKING IT WORK

Accessing services for children can often present "closed doors" resulting from a fragmented service delivery system composed of a variety of service agencies with a variety of program orientation, eligibility criteria, and guidelines. There are no easy ways to "unlock" these doors. However, through working together, agencies can help children and their families in accessing services and in making the transition from one service agency to another. As a result, interagency coordination has become a common theme in human services. While it can be a challenge, making interagency coordination work is facilitated by basic organizational strategies and principles of group dynamics.

Organizational Strategies

1. Start with agencies which are genuinely interested, even if the group is small. As the group progresses and has accomplishments, others will likely want to join. There are some advantages in starting small, because the group is more informal and easier to manage.

2. Choose a regular meeting date and time, e.g. the first Tuesday of each month.

3. Elect a chairperson for the group.

4. Elect a recorder for the group. Take minutes of each meeting to circulate among members and others (potential members, agencies that need to be kept abreast of the group's activities).

5. Initial activities should focus on getting to know each other. These may include: (1) simple needs assessment to identify services provided by members and things to do as an organization, (2) a tour of member agencies' programs (if membership is small) or collection of fact sheets on each agency to share, or (3) an identification of things each can "share" and things they "need" from collaboration. This will lead to the discovery of things in common as well as the benefits of diversity, setting the foundation for an ultimate group identity.

6. Establish one or more goals . . . a purpose . . . from the start. Goals can and should change with time and as things are accomplished needs change. In goal setting, priorities can be established based on (1) needs of individual agencies and the community-at-large, (2) the degree to which personnel and financial resources are currently in place to assist in carrying out the goal, and (3) the degree to which addressing a particular strategy appears to be a timely issue. The bottom line is to choose immediately something about which all can agree, which is low cost in time and money, which has a high likelihood of success, and which will give the

group some visibility.

7. Publicize interagency efforts, including a listing of member agencies. PR will help your efforts achieve credibility, will help promote awareness of preschool services, and will help member agencies.

8. Don't be in a hurry. Start small and have reasonable goals. Set the group up for success. Keep activities manageable.

9. Allow time to get to know other group members as individuals. For example, serve refreshments and allow time to "get acquainted" or schedule meetings so that members can go for coffee or a meal afterwards. It will take time for the members to build "trust" in each other and in the group itself.

10. Have an agenda for meetings. Try to stay on task, starting and ending on time. Group members are obviously very busy people with many other responsibilities. It is important to keep this meeting one that they will want to be sure not to miss.

11. Keep everyone involved. As the group establishes goals, make sure that each member has some type of role. As the group grows, it may be helpful to have committees, e.g. 2 or 3 members to be in charge of staff development, a committee for family involvement, or a committee for transition administration.

GROUP DYNAMICS

1. There is no place for an "us and them" mentality. Be willing to identify both problems and solutions to compromise. Don't ask someone else to change in order to solve a problem until you have truthfully answered the question, "What am I doing to contribute to my own problem?" Work together in seeking solutions. Successful interagency coordination requires a commitment to make it work and a willingness to try new ideas, to be creative, and to share.

2. Use good communication skills in sending and receiving messages verbally, in writing, or through gestures. Be sensitive to what is said and not said and how it is said. Listen. Ask question in an effort to learn, to understand. Keep communication open and honest. Stay in touch. Keep people informed.

3. Interagency coordination boils down to people dealing with people. People like to be treated with respect and to be able to trust and to know they are trusted. They like positive reinforcement for the "good" things they are doing. They like for others to demonstrate a desire to know and understand their programs and problems. They are less likely to change a position when they are asked to defend it.

SAMPLE LETTER OF INVITATION TO LOCAL INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

Dear _____,

We are interested in starting a local interagency council in our area. It is a group of agencies that join together to coordinate services in early childhood programs. There are local interagency councils already established in many communities and states.

Local interagency councils help communities coordinate and expand existing services. Such coordination has always benefitted the children and families we serve. With the recent passage of federal legislation under PL 99-457 and PL 102-119, interagency coordination will be even more important and local interagency councils are a good way to do this. We'll both be joining in this area and joining an emerging network of local interagency councils working together to improve services. It is a real opportunity.

Our local interagency council organizational meeting is scheduled for:

Date and Time: Location:

Please use the enclosed RSVP to let us know if you can attend. Hope to see you at the meeting!

Sincerely,

Local Interagency Council Meeting RSVP

Name: _____ Title: _____

Agency: _____ Address: _____

_____

Phone: _____ I can attend _____ Yes _____ No

I cannot attend but am interested in the local interagency council _____

Please return by _____ to:

LOCAL INTERAGENCY COUNCIL
ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING AGENDA

Introductions

What is a local interagency council and how did they get started?

Why is there a need?

- coordinate services
- improve services
- PL 99-457 and PL 102-119

What can a local interagency council accomplish?

What are additional benefits?

What are tips on making a local interagency council work?

- organizational strategies
- group dynamics

DECISION: Do we form a local interagency council?

If so, plans for the next meeting:

- survey to complete and bring or send back
- plans for choosing a chairperson and recorder
- plans for next meeting

Adjournment

LOCAL INTERAGENCY COUNCIL SURVEY

1. Agency Name: _____

   Mailing Address: _____

   _____

   Phone: _____

   Local Interagency Council Contact: _____

   Title of Contact: _____

   Agency Head: _____

2. Please provide a brief description of the services that you provide to preschool children (ages birth through 5 years) with disabilities. Please write in a brief narrative paragraph telling basically (1) who you serve, (2) geographic restrictions, (3) types of service(s), (4) eligibility requirements, etc.

3. Please identify ways in which you would like to work with the Local Interagency Council addressing community needs (please rate by number with number 1 being the thing that should be first priority):

   _____ Transition
   _____ Public Awareness on the Need for Early Intervention/Special Education
   _____ Joint Staff Training
   _____ Cross Program Visitation
   _____ Joint Parent Training
   _____ Sharing of Materials

4. Do you know other agencies which should be involved in Local Interagency Councils?

   Agency Name **Contact Person** **Phone**